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No peace without development : a research-creation proposition

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Summary

- Global Affairs Canada's ongoing review of assistance programs suggests that "Canada is back." But is this really the case with regards to international development policy and practices?
- As conveyed in the discussion paper connected to the review, Development Canada's underlying rationales for assessment and innovation in international assistance programs gesture (back) towards the neoliberal development rationales of the previous government.
- The article is used to advocate the use of research-creation as an alternative means of assessment and innovation in international assistance programs.

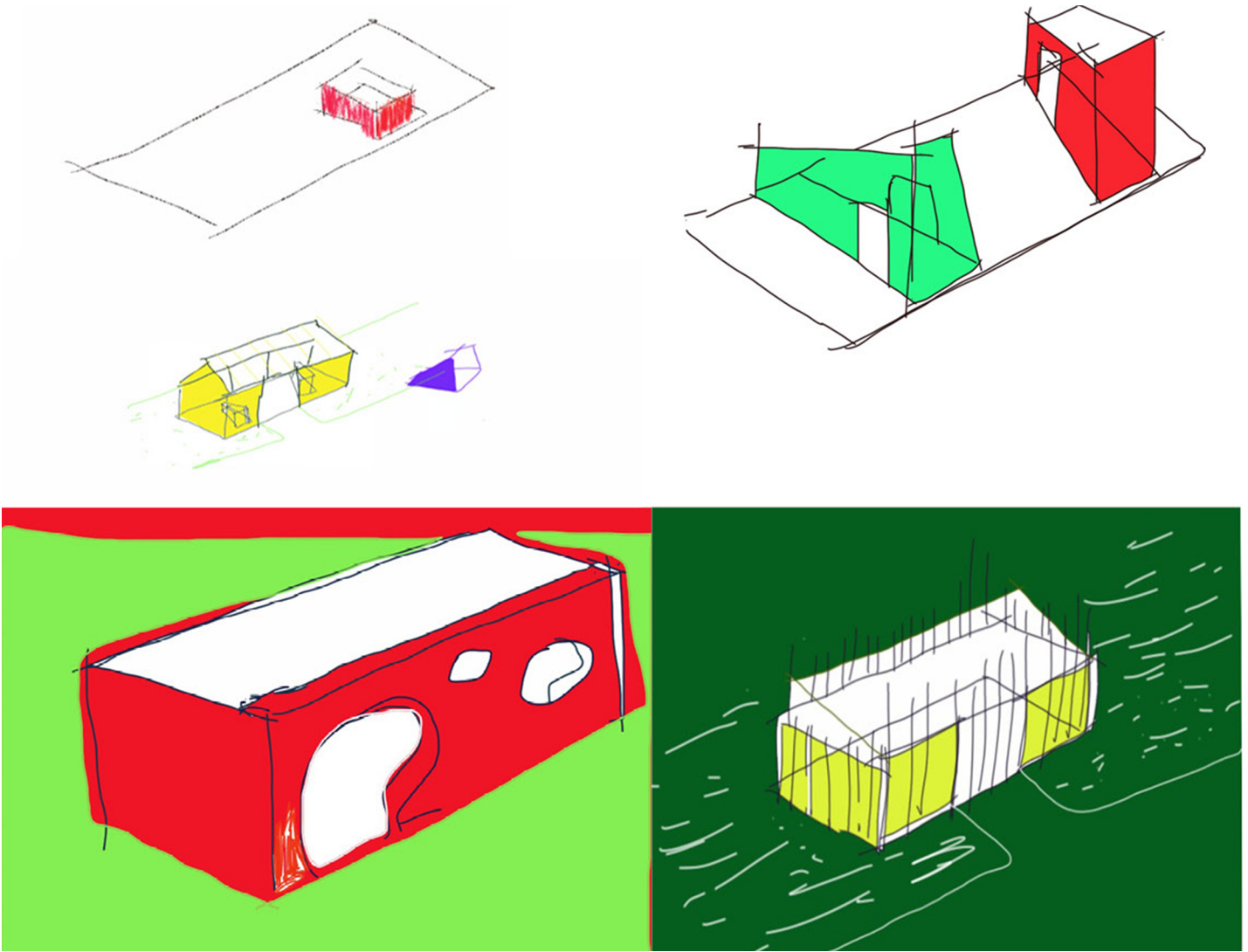
The Trudeau government has made a tonal shift in Canada's international development policy if not yet a sustained shift in policy and practices. Thinking about this shift is especially important as the government is poised to send military personnel to Africa for new peace operations. Why? No international development justice, no peace.

Part of the change in international development policy has unfolded with the government's decision to launch a review of Canada's assistance programs in the summer of 2016. Government's review includes both a broad discussion paper

and an invitation to Canadians and other stakeholders to make public comments about the future direction of Canadian international development policy. Presentation of the new international development policy is scheduled for winter 2017 with implementation commencing in spring 2017.

A stated outcome of the review is a renewed engagement with the Global South that is substantive and meaningful. But are the government's moves an effort to reclaim the moral authority in North-South relations claimed by Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, or a continuation of development agendas and practices emerging after the Cold War with the rise of neoliberalism?

In a "Canada is back" vein (harkening back to the 1960s and 1970s), Trudeau government positions seem to make a clean break with the policies championed by the Harper government that preceded it. Contrasting outlooks come to the fore in the 2016 discussion paper disseminated as part of the international assistance review. Most notably, the new government used the paper to declare that Canada's international assistance is "driven by a moral imperative to provide international assistance, not only because it is the right thing to do but because we recognize that a peaceful, just and prosperous world benefits us all."¹ By contrast, the previous Harper government notably dismantled the Canadian International



Afield concept drawings, Democratic Early Childhood Development project, South Africa.

Development Agency (CIDA) and consolidated CIDA's responsibilities into a new superministry consolidating foreign affairs, trade, and development duties. This reorganization made it easier for the previous government to subordinate a concern with poverty elimination to Canada's security policies and especially trade imperatives.²

Though rhetorically a departure from the Harper government, the Trudeau government's international assistance review discussion paper contains significant traces of the previous government's governance rationales. For example, in the discussion paper, the new government privileges governance rationales clearly subscribing to very particular conceptualizations of "accountability," "efficiency," "evaluation," "risk," "transparency," and outputs problematized by David Craig and Doug Porter in *Development Beyond Neoliberalism*.³

Excessive reliance on such assessment logics inherited from

the previous government preclude the embrace of innovative paths that might emerge if research-creation becomes more integral to international development. Ian Smillie used his lively chapter in *Rethinking Canadian Aid* to assert that neoliberal assessment rationales and instruments as deployed by Canadian development officials are little more than measurements intended to confirm the effectiveness of Canadian development programs. In form, according to Smillie, Canadian development logics and metrics resemble those used by Soviet central planners. For Smillie, international development, Canadian-style, culminates with an Ottawa bent on "turning out good-looking but impossible plans, and results that bear no resemblance to their objective."⁴ But, as Smillie suggested, this matters little because the right logics and metrics can make the impossible possible and objectives match results.

We use this brief submission to gesture towards another kind

of international development. “Doing” and “studying” development figure in this proposition. Specifically, research-creation, deployed for international development ends, offers a productive means of assessing development practices and programs in ways that advance innovation. This alternative means of assessment and innovation can be used to blunt neoliberal traces underlying development policies, programs, and practices in Canada and elsewhere.

Research-creation

Broadly, research-creation is a more open mode of investigating a given concern, or challenge. It is not inherently done to arrive at a singular answer in an input-output mode but investigating to generate new questions and a range of insightful perspectives. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) offers a definition that others frequently cite. SSHRC defines research-creation as “an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation.”⁵

The Fonds de Recherche du Québec Société et Culture (FRQSC), from which SSHRC’s definition draws, characterizes research-creation as: “research processes or approaches that foster creation as a continuous process. Depending on the practices and temporalities specific to each project, these may combine design, experimentation, production, and/or critical and theoretical analysis of the creative process.”⁶

To the best of our knowledge, we are the only ones using research-creation in Canada (and perhaps anywhere) within international development and international development studies contexts. Research-creation, not to be confused with research on “creationism” (as in the evolution-creation debate), is mostly associated with arts-based research and production. And research-creation is strongly grounded in practice that is “creative” and “research” that interprets creative practice in art disciplines as opposed to a professional design field like architecture. Colleagues working in a research-creation mode usually do not even pay short shrift to something like the literature review so sacrosanct in scholarship. Along these lines, Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk⁷ use an interesting article on research-creation methodology to pinpoint York University’s Caitlin Fisher’s hypertextual novels as exemplary research-creation production. Fisher’s research on sex, gender, and media technologies

led to Fisher’s novel *These Waves of Girls*.⁸ The University of Alberta’s Department of Art and Design hosts the “Research-Creation + Social Justice CoLABoratory” that “supports research-creation practices attuned to social justice.”⁹ Concordia’s PhD in humanities program actually has a research-creation stream. Graduates in the Concordia program have studio art as one of their specializations, they have a studio comprehensive exam, and the thesis “may include non-paper components – such as digital media, and audio and visual production – accompanied by a written scholarly text of 150-200 pages.”¹⁰

In our own work, we frequently align design practice and development studies scholarship in a research-creation mode. Such a research-creation pairing means that we simultaneously do development and study development in a critical theory register. Research-creation as deployed in our work is made easier with scholar-practitioner collaboration, which means fostering a working relationship between a political scientist and licensed architect (who happens to also be a design historian) in our case. However, our working relationship is quite different than the scholar-practitioner nexus Rebecca Tiessen and Ian Smillie have in mind when

advocating collaborations between scholars and practitioners with the practitioners being those in government and NGOs understood to be more invested in the “doing” instead of the academic “studying” of development.¹¹

“Doing” and “studying” international development

Veering away from research-creation work stemming from art practice, and away from the “connection” Tiessen and Smillie favour to mend the “disconnect” between practice and scholarship, we advocate an interdisciplinary research-creation that advances development like the development-design work that we do as a political scientist and a licensed architect. Our brand of research-creation features the simultaneous doing of development and studying it beyond the action research for development purposes practiced at a place like the University of Sussex’s Institute of Development Studies.¹² While much action research has community organizing qualities, development and design as we practice it works at a very different scale than community organizing. Development-design in our practice also notably bears the structuring logic of the design profession that is architecture with all of the pluses and minuses connected

This alternative means of assessment and innovation can be used to blunt neoliberal traces underlying development policies, programs, and practices in Canada and elsewhere.

to architecture as “profession”.

Our most significant research-creation project thus far is called “Democratic Early Childhood Development” (DECD). This project is currently underway in South Africa. Development and design deployed in a research-creation mode become our way of responding to a slew of studies including a South African study from 2016 used to assert that inadequate early childhood development (ECD) diminishes South African children’s potential and life chances.¹³

Central to our project is the design and construction of two prototype ECD centres (one urban and one rural) for South Africa’s poor. Both centres (i.e., crèche or daycare centres) must be cost effective and broadly sustainable so that the prototypes might be more widely adopted, or, more preferable, adapted. A national ECD centre audit conducted by the state found that substandard infrastructure was the biggest impediment to advancing SA’s national ECD policy.¹⁴ Provisions for more standard infrastructure not only make delivery of SA’s National Curriculum Framework¹⁵ for ECD more effective; meeting health and safety requirements as well as effectively delivering a flexible curriculum means that more ECD centres can be certified by authorities and, thus, become eligible for state subsidies used to underwrite ECD costs for the poorest.

Using research-creation to advance action research with a design edge, we use DECD, a SSHRC-funded project, to work with various local stakeholders. This work includes all elements of the design and construction process, including design research leading to preliminary design, schematic design, design development, and contract documents. Our primary interlocutors are the Early Learning Research Unit (ELRU), which is one of SA’s and the continent’s leading NGOs working in the ECD sector, and the National Development Agency (NDA) whose head reports to the national Minister of Social Development, as well as the City of Cape Town and the Municipality of Saldanha Bay. ELRU provides vital links to other key interlocutors—most importantly, townships and rural ECD forums. These forums are civic associations formed by ECD practitioners and these practitioners are nearly all women of colour. These relationships help to establish context for the project and, in fact, inform the flexible structure of the project.

The project does not end as do other development projects. Namely, the structures will become boundary objects used for research. This research will include work on how the prototypes are used to inform future structures, how design’s power helps to embed curricular objectives into the physical

space of the building, how teachers use design features of the prototypes to deliver a curriculum in which citizenship and self-identity feature prominently, as well as to understand student achievement as impacted by the prototypes.

From our DECD field experiences, several takeaways are emerging. These impressions inform our understanding of the ways that research-creation can feature in the assessment of assistance programs. Research-creation as we deploy it in our projects, like the DECD project, starts at a very different point than most assessment processes measuring what is intended and achieved with the implementation of a given development program. Namely, our research-creation starts when new programmatic direction is desired but, given the demands of development practice and resource shortfalls, this new direction does not start when the stakeholders want it to start. Research-creation as we interpret and draw from it, consistent with design thinking, utilizes a running, or ongoing, assessment metric that starts as a project is being conceptualized. Four elements of research-creation for international development strike us at this stage of our project as we think about assessment and observe DECD in motion: contextualization, reflection, innovation, dissemination.

Context and being contextual in development work matters. Contextual knowledge is particularly critical to the co-creation process advanced through research-creation with a design orientation. We realize that adequate contextualization helps to shape the parameters of a development project and helps to predict the challenges most likely to emerge—like in the design world and design practice. Contextual knowledge aids in the identification of agents whose participation is needed to tap broad local knowledge, which might include navigating regulatory hurdles put in place by the state as well as stakeholders’ experiential knowledge of state resources that might be tapped. Knowledge of context is fundamental to research-creation and design projects with doing and studying development at their core. Such knowledge makes the nexus of a project accumulative and incremental with the research-creator doing more than gathering knowledge that then gets passed to a development practitioner charged with implementation. The research-creator using design becomes a development practitioner who consumes and produces contextual knowledge in the field. In fact, using a journalism analogy, research-creators engaged in development practice are as likely to make news as report it.

This differs in magnitude from the “contextualized knowledge” that David R. Black recently named as the most important resource needed as Canada projects a new peace operations posture.¹⁶ Black’s contextualized knowledge is a knowledge

that researchers in academe, government, and NGOs, for example, are positioned to glean and analyze from any number of sources, assemble for dissemination, and deliver to consumers of knowledge who then in some way implement a program. Further, such knowledge in the standard development project really reflects the synthesized perspective of whoever is the author of the baseline study¹⁷ report as opposed to the shared understanding of contextual knowledge emerging in a research-creation where co-creation is core. And, further, the standard baseline development study tends to be drawn from narrow sources as opposed to a range of sources that might include sources more commonly used by creative communities (e.g., visual evidence, or evidence derived from performance sources) not to mention reading these sources through very different disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary lenses.

Beyond upending binary notions of knowledge production and consumption, research-creators doing and studying development with a design thinking sensibility help to create the conditions for a very different type of reflexive thinking. “Reflexivity” as used in social sciences has come to mean subjecting oneself as researcher to critical scrutiny—asking, for example, about the researcher’s impact upon the data as collected and interpreted. Such inquiry calls into question ideas about objectivity that has led social scientists to liken their work to the (other) “hard” sciences. Research-creation projects like ours, aligning development and design, are reflexive. But, because of the co-creation elements so central to our project as a design project, our reflexivity as research-creators takes place as our partners and collaborators find themselves looking introspectively into what they do, how they do it, and even who they are. This has an assessment air to it—self-assessment, and institutional assessment. However, assessment as undertaken by our DECD interlocutors radically diverges from the Gosplan central planning quality that Smillie assigns to assessment in the development sector world built upon neoliberal rationales. Our partners engage in assessment using their own critical metrics as opposed to measures strictly prescribed by, for example, a funder. And these metrics draw from the lurking demands of funders and supervising directors bound by short-term neoliberal interests as well as more ideologically contrary (i.e., critical of neoliberalism) and pragmatic wells. In our case, our interlocutors who mostly have some kind of direct link to South Africa’s liberation struggle that defeated apartheid, reach for a decolonizing end but with a real awareness of the imbricated nature of inequality in South Africa.

Factoring contextual knowledge and reflexivity into our

research-creation project utilizing design thinking has led to innovation. For example, our preliminary design evolved from the evidence-based tabulation of an in-house ECD centre assessment tool of our primary NGO interlocutor (ELRU), South Africa’s National Curriculum Framework, municipal health and safety requirements, and provincial guidelines for ECD centre administration and governance. Cross-tabulating this data prompted multiple conversations with our interlocutors with many of these conversations really being, at some level, forms of assessment. This assessment, though, took on a very different quality beyond the assessment that might be required by a funder. Assessment growing from our deployment of research-creation to align development and design was as much about creating something new as looking back in order to measure what had occurred. Without Smillie’s Gosplan characteristics, something new, and innovative, is coming into being: ECD centre prototypes that integrally spatialize the broad and flexible objectives of the National Curriculum Framework, municipal health and safety standards, and centre governance and administrative norms prescribed by provincial government. And, as one ELRU staffer said, this is something specialized and, really, within the scope of design practitioners (a political scientist and architect in our case) able to channel the disparate agendas and interests of stakeholders.

Dissemination accentuates all that we do in a research-creation mode to further development through design. Knowledge generated from the project—including this brief note, not to mention peer-reviewed and other publications, public talks to academic and non-academic audiences, the structures themselves as part of the built environment—enhances discourse on design, politics, development, ECD, etc., and their intersections.

Conclusion

The South African case highlights the relationship between economic development and justice in a society rife with conflict nearly twenty-three years after the formal peace ending apartheid. Research-creation, we argued, can facilitate innovative assistance programs that bolster social justice attuned to local contexts. Such an undertaking can inform peacebuilding programs aimed at everyday citizens in conflict-ridden settings.

Development Canada’s acknowledgement of the relationship between development and peace as well as the need for innovation speak to the urgency of pursuing development in a different register. “Innovation” as used in Development Canada’s international assistance review discussion paper

suggests that innovation can be found in the same old places. Research-creation broadens the development and peacekeeping conversation so that the conversation more forthrightly includes those in the creative fields, those from more academic backgrounds not afraid to engage those in creative fields, or those who are research-creators who go back and forth between creative practice and scholarship to nurture new knowledge. Along with new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives come new methods of analysis and assessment, as well as new means to innovation.

In addition to the collaboration between a design practitioner and political scientist such as ours, we envision research-creators who use creative forms like theatre and photography as creative media advancing peace. Using creative modes as we imagine it goes beyond the creation of a development program. We see research-creators freeing us from stale answers to old development and peace questions.

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¹ Global Affairs Canada, 2016, International assistance review: discussion paper, Ottawa, p. 6.

² See Brown, S., 2016, "Canadian aid policy during the Harper years", in A. Chapnick and C. J. Kukucha, (eds.), *The Harper era in Canadian foreign policy: parliament, politics, and Canada's global posture*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, pp. 167-180; McKercher, A., and Sarson, L., 2016, "Dollars and sense?: the Harper government, economic diplomacy, and Canadian foreign policy", *International journal*, 71, pp. 351-370.

³ Craig, D., and Porter, D., 2006, *Beyond neoliberalism?: governance, poverty reduction, and political economy*, New York, Routledge.

⁴ Smillie, I., 2014, "Results, risk, rhetoric and reality: the need for common sense in Canada's development assistance", in S. Brown, M. den Heyer, and D. R. Black, (eds.), *Rethinking Canadian Aid*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, pp. 88-90.

⁵ SSHRC, 2016.
<http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22>.

⁶ FRQSC, 2016.
<http://www.frqsc.gouv.qc.ca/en/bourses-et-subventions/concours-anterieurs/bourse?id=5aeb9wba1466537413107>.

⁷ Chapman, O., and Sawchuk, K., 2012, "Research-creation:

intervention, analysis and 'family resemblances", *Canadian journal of communication*, 37, pp. 5-26.

⁸ Fisher, C., 2001, *These Waves of Girls*.
<http://www.yorku.ca/caitlin/waves/navigate.html>.

⁹ University of Alberta Research-creation + social justice co-laboratory.
<http://www.researchcreation.ca/>.

¹⁰ Concordia University PhD in Humanities.
<https://www.concordia.ca/artsci/cissc/phd-humanities/research-creation.html>.

¹¹ Tiessen, R., and Smillie, I., 2016 (online early), "The disconnect between international development studies and development practice in Canada", *Canadian journal of development studies*.

¹² See the special issue of the Institute's 2012 IDS bulletin, 43.

¹³ Van der Berg, S., 2016, "What the ANAs tell us about socioeconomic learning gaps in South Africa", RESEP policy brief, University of Stellenbosch, April.

¹⁴ Republic of South Africa, 2015, *The National integrated early childhood development policy*, Pretoria, Government Printers.

¹⁵ Department of Basic Education, 2015, *The South African national curriculum framework*, Pretoria, Government Printers.

¹⁶ Charbonneau, B., 2016, "'Canada is back': the Centre FrancoPaix discussion on Canadian foreign Policy", *Bulletin FrancoPaix*, Vol 1, N°10 p. 4.

¹⁷ A baseline study aims to establish data of reference to evaluate progress and effectiveness of an activity during its implementation and after its achievement.



News and announcements

- Marie Brossier edited with Muriel Gomez-Perez the special issue « Negotiating and inhabiting social norms in Africa south of the Sahara » in the journal "Recherches féministes".
- Marie Brossier published [« Senegal's Arabic literates: from transnational education to linguistic and political activism»](#), in the journal "Mediterranean Politics".
- Marie Brossier gave a presentation in December 2016 to the international workshop "Sahelian Identities in Times of Crisis", in Bamako, Mali, on the theme "Education and politics across the Sahel: the case of Arabic literates in Senegal". She also took part to the African Studies Association (ASA) Annual Meeting in Washington, USA, presenting "Family Party: Dynastic Successions and Political Parties in Senegal".
- Bruno Charbonneau presented the Mali Project of the Centre FrancoPaix to the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces on December 15th.
- Maxime Ricard gave a presentation to the Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM) of the french Ministry of Defense on December 16th, on the theme "Governing the post-conflict in Côte d'Ivoire".

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